**SUGARCANE: TAMIL NADU LEADS THE WAY TOWARDS HIGHER YIELDS**

Though Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra contribute the major share of sugarcane production in India, Tamil Nadu ranks first in productivity.

Across the world, there are two major sugar yielding crops, namely, sugarcane and sugar beet. The botanical name for sugar cane is *sacharum officinarum* and for sugar beet, it is *beta vulgaris*. Sugar cane is produced in the tropics and subtropics, while beet is produced in the temperate zones. Approximately 70 per cent of the world’s sugar is produced from sugarcane and 30 per cent from sugar beet.

Sugarcane is an important commercial crop in India, where about 4.2 million hectares are under cultivation, resulting in an annual output of approximately 300 million tonnes of sugarcane. About 52 million farmers are dependent on sugarcane cultivation for their livelihood. In addition, roughly an equal number of agricultural labourers earn their living by cultivating or managing the sugarcane crop.

In India, sugarcane is the primary raw material for all the sugar mills as well as for cottage industries producing *gur* (jaggery) and khandasari. About 7.5 million people are employed directly or indirectly in sugar mills.

Over the past four decades, the government has promoted India’s sugar production by implementing a structured and planned sugar programme. Central planners aim to set targets, monitor the demand and production requirements, and even forecast the harvest in order to meet the country’s domestic demands.

Further, in order to achieve the set targets, the government has been

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**India’s Share in Global Sugar Production**

- Brazil: 21.81%
- European Union: 11.00%
- USA: 4.51%
- Australia: 2.97%
- Thailand: 4.38%
- Russia: 2.15%
- Mexico: 3.40%
- Rest of the world: 24.73%
setting up committees and task forces from time to time to make policy changes in consultation with the industry, state agriculture departments, etc, prior to implementing a cane and sugar pricing policy. Also, the government has been closely monitoring the licensing policy.

India is known as the original home of sugar and sugarcane. Indian mythology supports this fact as it is replete with legends showing the origin of sugarcane. India is the second largest producer of sugarcane next to Brazil.

Apart from white sugar, India also manufactures about 26 million tonnes of cane sugar sweeteners like khandsari and gur. Gur and khandsari are consumed mostly by the rural population in India. In the early 1930s nearly two-thirds of the country’s sugarcane production was used to make such traditional sweeteners. With a better standard of living and higher incomes, the demand has shifted to white sugar. Currently, only about one-third of the sugarcane grown is used to make gur and khandsari. Being part of the small-scale sector, the manufacture of these two products is completely free from the controls and taxes applicable to the sugar sector.

**The Indian scenario**

In India, sugarcane is the country’s third largest crop, next to rice and wheat. The sugar industry is also the second largest agro-based industry next to cotton textiles in India. The sugar yield is not only related to the industry’s manufacturing capacity but also to the availability of sugarcane. The erratic monsoon and fluctuating prices are also vital factors influencing India’s sugar output.

Table I indicates that the area under cane cultivation was the highest ever (5151 thousand hectares) in the year 2006-07. The yield per hectare was also the highest that year.

**Tamil Nadu**

Sugarcane is one of the traditional crops grown abundantly across the state of Tamil Nadu. Currently, 352,000 hectares are under cane cultivation and this is increasing annually due to the increased consumption of sugar and also the growing demand from mills for sugar cane as a raw material. The climatic and soil conditions as well as other facilities like irrigation have facilitated increased sugarcane cultivation in Tamil Nadu.
Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh are the top two Indian states in terms of the area under cultivation as well as their contribution to sugar production in India. Though Tamil Nadu ranks fourth both in the area under cane cultivation and sugar production, it has emerged as the state with the highest productivity.

Tamil Nadu’s yield of 102 tonnes/hectare is the highest among all Indian states. The second place in productivity is taken by West Bengal, followed by Karnataka. Uttar Pradesh, with the largest area under cultivation, ranks 14th in productivity.

To improve sugarcane cultivation, the following measures are recommended:

1. Introduce high-yielding varieties of sugarcane
2. Supply planting materials in time
3. Reduce the gap in yield
4. Introduce short-duration varieties
5. Encourage cultivation of organic sugarcane
6. Strengthen agricultural research
7. Look into the farmers’ interests
8. Ensure timely harvesting

As the state of Tamil Nadu has shown, even a smaller area under cultivation can produce high yields through better productivity. Thus by following a few best practices, even the existing acreage under sugarcane cultivation can be used to vastly improve India’s sugar output.

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### Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area ('000 ha)</th>
<th>Crop yield ('000 tonnes)</th>
<th>Productivity (t/ha)</th>
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<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>315</td>
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<td>2001-02</td>
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<td>2009-10</td>
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<td>31,807</td>
<td>101.2</td>
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</table>

Source: Cooperative Sugar, Vol.42 (4), Dec 2010

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